



Representative
Jeri Costa

38th Legislative District

1998 Session Preview

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As I write this on January 12, the Washington State Legislature is less than an hour away from gaveling the 1998 legislative session to life. This will be our short session, slated to last 60 days. In odd-numbered years, the Legislature meets for 150 days, and we're used to thinking of the long session as the one that really counts, with the even-numbered years considered a sort of afterthought.

This session promises to shatter that stereotype. While I can't predict what the results will be at this point, I can say that your state lawmakers will have an opportunity to show real leadership on a number of truly important issues during the next two months. I hope that, when I report back to you in the spring, I can point with pride to what we have accomplished here in Olympia.

I've touched on several of these issues in this newsletter. I ask you to look it over, see which of these are of particular importance to you and your family, and provide me with your advice, opinions and information. It's an honor to serve you, but to do the best possible job, I need to know what you think.

Best wishes,



Jeralita "Jeri" Costa

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DUI REFORM AT LAST?

Back in 1996 I was a sponsor of HB 2412, which would have reduced the criminal “drunkenness threshold” from .10 percent blood alcohol to .08 percent for DUI purposes. I don’t want to even guess how many lives might have been saved had that bill become law. We introduced the bill on the third day of the session, and it was promptly referred to the House Law & Justice Committee. The legislative will to act on it was not present, and the bill was never heard from again.

Until now. Shortly before this session, Governor Locke proposed a law that is essentially identical to HB 2412, and he has asked me to sign on as a sponsor. Legislators in both parties are finally seeming to realize how important it is to protect citizens on our roads and highways, and to pun-

ish the drivers who risk their lives and yours every time they slide behind the wheel while intoxicated. I expect the new law to pass--better late than never.



HIGHER EDUCATION TAKES HIGHER PROFILE

The long fight for a four-year university to serve students in the Snohomish/Skagit County vicinity is continuing, and we’re winning. Last year’s capital budget allocated \$376,000 for a study by the Higher Education Coordinating Board of education needs in the area. The verdict of the HEC Board? We need a four-year school, and we could support one.

The board recommends that the new school, which would likely be located in Everett, should be administered by a consortium of existing universities, allowing us to draw on the best of

several schools. The consortium would presumably include the University of Washington, Western Washington University, Central Washington University and area community colleges.

A predesign study funded from the same \$376,000 budget is now underway. We expect to make a budget request to get the as-yet-unnamed university fully funded during the 1999 legislative session, moving one big step closer to the goal we’ve envisioned for so long.

On a related note, I’m very interested in a novel idea put forth by a group of Washington university and college administrators. They’re urging the state to establish a \$500 million public-private partnership to provide an Endowment for Higher Education. The plan is for the state to put up \$250 million, which would be matched by private donations to create permanent endowments at institutions of higher learning throughout the state. As with all endowments, the Endowment for Higher Education would produce spendable interest, while the principal would be left untouched. I’ll be paying close attention to the plan as it unfolds, and my inclination at this point is to offer my full support.

38th Legislative District



UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES

More than half the pregnancies in this state are not planned at the time of conception. Nearly a third of these pregnancies end in abortion. Sixty-eight percent of births to Washington women between the ages of 20 and 24 are the result of unintended pregnancies, and well over half of all births from unintended pregnancies are to married women.

Surprising statistics? They were to me. But the results aren't surprising. What these pregnancies lead to is a teenager who loses her future and has a child she didn't want; children who grow up in poverty and face higher risk of violence; a struggling, two-income working family with kids, who once again will have to choose between paying for day care or losing a needed paycheck.

I'll be supporting legislation this year requiring insurance companies to make family planning

services a standard benefit, rather than the rarity that they are today. After all, 85 percent of the plans in the state will pay for abortions once a pregnancy has begun; does it then make sense that only 27 percent cover any kind of contraceptive, and fewer than one in 10 covers oral contraceptives as a prescription benefit?

These same insurance companies that won't cover the cost of contraceptives, by the way, also refuse to sell individuals health insurance with maternity coverage. If you buy your health insurance as an individual rather than through a group, you may already know how hard it is to buy maternity coverage—even if you have the money.

The costs of unintended pregnancies affect us all. Because of that, I'm proud to say I'll continue working toward a society where every pregnancy can be a planned and joyful event.

TRANSPORTATION

The transportation picture in our state is, to be blunt, a mess. The word "pothole" has become the punchline in a joke; our freight immobility drains millions of dollars a year from our economy; "road rage" has bullied its way into our vocabulary; and with a million more people expected to move into the Puget Sound region within a generation, we may soon look back on our current situation as being the good old days.

Transportation is threatening to become like heaven. Everybody talks about it, but no one wants to go there right now. And if we get through this session of the Legislature without taking some meaningful and bold steps, I'll consider the session to have been a failure. I feel strongly that transportation should not be a partisan issue, and I'll work with an open mind to find creative, affordable and effective solutions. I agree with sentiments expressed in a letter last week from Phillip Bussey, president of the Washington Roundtable: "[A]fter education, transportation is the most critical factor affecting our state's future economic prosperity."

I do want to make one thing clear: I'm disturbed by talk of devoting the entire Motor Vehicle Excise Tax--our license tab fee--to the transportation budget. Many people don't realize that a portion of the MVET goes to help local communities administer their criminal justice activities. Not only do I oppose shortchanging our local governments, I favor increasing the amount of MVET fees that fund law enforcement at its most basic level--the streets. I've heard many people talk about "creative" solutions to the transportation crisis; this one doesn't qualify.





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ENERGY DEREGULATION

Our state currently enjoys the lowest electric rates in the country. Californians and New Yorkers, for example, pay more than twice what we pay for power. Considering this, why would anyone support deregulating this vital industry? Supporters suggest that competition could lower our rates even more, but opponents counter that the only one saving under deregulation will be large industrial users.



For the residents of the 38th District, and for the entire state, I intend to do everything I can to preserve our affordable rate structure. I have nothing against people or businesses in other states, but I cannot see the wisdom in subsidizing their energy needs at our own expense. To gain my support, any deregulation plan proposed now or in future sessions will need to meet some basic standards.

- Legislation should not be enacted without extensive public debate. Working families who have the most to lose under deregulation must play a real and significant role in the process.

- I will not support a plan that raises the rates being charged to residential customers at the time a plan is enacted.
- Reliability should be maintained to prevent power outages.
- Any plan put forth will need to include genuine safeguards against consumer fraud and abusive practices, including intrusive telemarketing operations.

PLEASE KEEP IN TOUCH

I hope you'll continue to share your thoughts, suggestions, comments and questions by phone, fax, e-mail, letter or the toll-free legislative hotline. State law, however, restricts legislative mailings in an election year. If you wish to receive additional information and updates on a particular topic, please complete this card and return it to my office.

Representative Costa:

Please send me additional information and keep me updated on the Legislature's progress on the following issues.

PUBLIC SAFETY/CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- DUI
- Crime Victims
- Sex Offender Laws
- Juvenile Justice
- Sentencing Issues

HEALTH CARE

- Basic Health Plan
- Reproductive Rights
- Private Insurance Coverage

TRANSPORTATION

- Gas Tax
- Snohomish County Projects
- Motor Vehicle Excise Tax

EDUCATION

- K-12 Funding
- Construction Funding
- Higher Education
- Vocational/Technical Training

OTHER (Please specify) _____

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